





Scientific letter

Scurvy: A call to maintain awareness

Escorbuto: una enfermedad actual

Antoni Riera-Mestre ^{a b c d}  , Olga Portolà ^e, Antonio Vidaller ^e

[Show more](#) 

 Outline |  Share  Cite

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.medcli.2024.11.020> 

[Get rights and content](#) 

Dear Editor,

Fresh fruits and vegetables are the primary sources of vitamin C (ascorbic acid), which is essential for the synthesis of collagen.¹ Scurvy results from vitamin C deficiency. Historically, scurvy was mostly linked to long-distance sea travels or plagued ships' crews and killed more sailors than any war. In 1747, James Lind, a doctor from the English Royal Navy, performed one of the first controlled clinical trial reported in the history of Medicine. He treated 12 sailors with severe symptoms of scurvy by supplementing their diet with different aliments. Lind concluded that "oranges and lemons were the most effectual remedies for this distemper at sea".² Thanks to this great achievement, the English won the war to scurvy. Since then, the incidence of scurvy has dropped sharply and currently it occurs mostly in developing world related to malnutrition.¹ Herein, we present an executive 45-year-old woman who developed scurvy in our country. She was admitted for sore and minor bleeding on her gums for several months with oral intolerance during the last days. Skin examination revealed cutaneous spontaneous hematomas, non-palpable purpura in a perifollicular distribution with "corkscrew" hair, ecchymoses and swelling on lower limbs ([Fig. 1](#)). Accurate anamnesis revealed a recommended "healthy" restricted diet without raw food. Blood C-vitamin level resulted undetectable, and the rest of laboratory tests were normal. Because of oral intolerance, treatment with intravenous C-Vitamin was administered switched to orally in the

following days. All signs and symptoms disappeared and 12 months after diagnosis, the patient remained asymptomatic.



[Download: Download high-res image \(1MB\)](#)

[Download: Download full-size image](#)

Fig. 1. Cutaneous spontaneous hematomas (red arrows), non-palpable purpura (white arrows) and “corkscrew” hairs on left lower limb (black arrows).

The resurgence of scurvy in industrialized countries can be attributed to multiple factors. The most common current scenarios include mental disorders, alcoholism, eating disorders, elderly, refugees, wars, meteorological disasters, intestinal malabsorption, or dialysis. Another cause is contemporary imbalanced dietary patterns, mostly due to nutritional misinformation about consumption of increasingly popular processed and convenience foods that are often devoid of vitamin C.^{1, 3, 4, 5} So, causes of scurvy are not limited to low-income individuals but in these vulnerable groups with inadequate intake of fresh products.

Like global measures applied by the English Royal Navy, the devastating consequences of scurvy can be reversed, and most important, prevented. Public health campaigns should emphasize the importance of a balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables, mainly in developing world but also in industrialized countries. Moreover, clinicians should

maintain awareness about the signs and symptoms of scurvy to ensure early diagnosis and treatment.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was obtained from the patient.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

[Recommended articles](#)

References

- 1 G. Grosso, R. Bei, A. Mistretta, S. Marventano, G. Calabrese, L. Masueli, *et al.*
Effects of vitamin C on health: a review of evidence
Front Biosci (Landmark Ed)., 18 (2013), pp. 1017-1029
[View in Scopus ↗](#) [Google Scholar ↗](#)
- 2 M. Bartholomew
James Lind's Treatise of the Scurvy (1753)
Postgrad Med J., 78 (2002), pp. 695-696
[View in Scopus ↗](#) [Google Scholar ↗](#)
- 3 Shari Lipner
A classic case of scurvy
The Lancet., 392 (2018), p. 431
 [View PDF](#) [View article](#) [View in Scopus ↗](#) [Google Scholar ↗](#)
- 4 P.M. Neves, S.P. Machado, C. Mimoso, M. Correia, S. Belo
A resurgence of scurvy in a developed country: a forgotten disease
Eur J Dermatol., 28 (2018), pp. 711-712
[Google Scholar ↗](#)
- 5 M. Fabriek, M. van den Berg
A forgotten disease in the twenty-first century: a case of scurvy
Int J Dermatol., 59 (2020), pp. e225-e226
[Google Scholar ↗](#)

Cited by (0)

[View Abstract](#)

© 2024 Elsevier España, S.L.U. All rights are reserved, including those for text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies.



All content on this site: Copyright © 2025 Elsevier B.V., its licensors, and contributors. All rights are reserved, including those for text and data mining, AI training, and similar technologies. For all open access content, the Creative Commons licensing terms apply.

